



DEPICTIONS OF THE GROTESQUE BODY

MEINTANI (A.) *The Grotesque Body in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. (Image & Context 21.) Pp. xii + 568, ills, colour pls. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. Cased, £118, €129.95, US\$149.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-069173-3.

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This volume addresses the complex topic of the function of so-called grotesque figurines in a variety of materials (mostly terracotta, marble and bronze) in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. M. surveys an enormous body of material, and using Bakhtinian theory, she is able to go beyond old and recent interpretations to emphasise the deeply positive meaning of these statuettes.

The book results from M.'s doctoral thesis submitted to the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München in 2015. One of the most challenging aspects of this kind of research is the lack of archaeological context for most of these figurines. M. does not shy away from the problem. Building on well-dated contexts (e.g. Priene excavations) of terracotta figurines as well as the vast amount of archaeological material and related publications that has accumulated since the days of Félix Régnauld and his colleagues from the Salpêtrière in the late nineteenth century, when the subject was first tackled scientifically (F. Régnauld, 'Terres cuites pathologiques de Smyrne', *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* [1909], 633–5), M. suggests a variety of approaches to curb this critical issue. One of the strong points of the volume is the meticulous review of the literature on each topic surveyed, and often on figurines the interpretation of which may seem obvious at first.

The overall structure of the book in nine sections or chapters is uneven: Chapters 1–3 (46 pages), Chapters 4–6 (70 pages), Chapter 7 (260 pages) and Chapters 8–9 (15 pages). Besides the varying lengths, the choice to separate theoretical aspects (Chapters 1–6) without calling it so from the survey of the material (Chapter 7) as well as by interspersing theoretical discussions in various chapters including Chapter 7 is rather chaotic. Given the vast number of figurines and the repetitive nature of this material, this structure may have been devised to enliven the read. This aim may also be the reason behind some stylistic choices, as M. often switches between informal prose and traditional academic style throughout the volume. However, these attempts fall short of their aim and muddy the waters concerning an already complex topic. The odd syntax, missing words, spelling mistakes, the mixture of formal academic language with informal colloquial expressions, with some expressions translated literally from other (undetermined) languages, is distracting. Some examples (among many): p. 25: 'Archaeologists struggle with piecemeal and soupy evidence. Reasonably enough, one dreams of hitting a giant jackpot'; p. 197: 'Put another way, they *play play play*'; p. 210 (discussing another scholar's point of view): 'I buy some but not all of it'.

The numerous high-quality illustrations of the material (368 figures, including 33 colour plates) are very welcome and a strong point in favour of this book, but the fact that the text is rarely on the same page as the illustration it describes is at times unhelpful.

However, M. moves with great ease from interpretation to interpretation, especially when it comes to tricky distinctions between 'pathological' (medical) grotesques and 'apotropaic' (against the evil-eye), 'humorous', 'stage' or 'cult-related' images. The reason she is often able to achieve this is due to her choice of surveying such a huge number of disparate figurines: she benefits from a splendid panoramic view of the entire material and

its potential interpretations. For instance, overall, her study of dwarves is masterful in that she incorporates previous notions from W.E. Stevenson (*The Pathological Grotesque Representation in Greek and Roman Art* [1975]), D. Gourevitch and M.D. Grmek (*Les maladies dans l'art antique* [1998]), J. Masségliia (*Body Language in Hellenistic Art and Society* [2015]) and others and brings a new perspective, well-summarised on p. 202: 'all these representations carried deeply positive associations. Their buyers and viewers laughed not *at* them, but with them, as their role was to contribute to the gaiety of religious festivities or to sympotic laughter'.

M. moves beyond past interpretations of the grotesque material to insist on the taste for the grotesque rather than comparing it constantly to ideal aesthetics. Just like other aspects of ancient humour that do not sit well with the modern (serious) view on religion, M. demonstrates that the need to create images of deformed bodies was not due to a sadistic attitude towards people with disabilities, but often to a carnivalesque attitude; for the dancing dwarves and cult servants, for example, bear positive connotations linked to religious practice. Also, it is often the case that 'the butt of the joke is not the cripple and the deformed, but the rather the Roman magistrate, the rhetor, the athlete' (p. 386). There is something missing in this gigantic survey of images of deformity: medical studies of ancient deformity and how they might inform M.'s grotesques, providing some crucial skeletal data, certain repetitive injuries, to learn more about the social place and status of men and women who probably worked despite their disabilities in other positions than cult attendants or dancers (e.g. S. Minozzi et al., 'Dwarfism in Imperial Rome: a Case of Skeletal Evidence', *J Clin Res Bioeth* 4 [2013], 154).

Regardless of the language issues, and missing recent publications on the notion of caricature in antiquity that might have benefited various sections of the book (e.g. A.G. Mitchell, 'Les handicaps et malformations à l'époque de Galien', in: A. Verbanck-Pierard, V. Boudon-Millot, D. Gourevitch [edd.], *Au temps de Galien, catalogue de l'exposition, Musée Royal de Mariemont* [2018], pp. 155–61; A. Gangloff, V. Huet and C. Vendries [edd.], *La notion de caricature dans l'Antiquité. Textes et images* [2021]), this volume is a welcome contribution to the field of terracotta figurines, ancient medicine, grotesques and humour.

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CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ETRURIA AND ANATOLIA

BAUGHAN (E.P.), PIERACCINI (L.C.) (edd.) *Etruria and Anatolia. Material Connections and Artistic Exchange*. Pp. xxiv + 344, b/w & colour ills, b/w & colour maps. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Cased, £90, US\$120. ISBN: 978-1-009-15102-3. doi:10.1017/S0009840X23002172

This volume collects the papers from an international conference, organised by Baughan and Pieraccini, held in Rome at the Villa Giulia Museum in May 2016. Its focus was to